

# Vinodorus

## A Dialogue Exploring a Frame of Reference for Dialectic as a Mode of Psychotherapy in the Treatment of Alcoholism

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*Persons of the Dialogue:* GLAUCON, ADEMANTIS, POLIMARCHUS, SOCRATES, VINODORUS

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**GLAUCON:** Listening to you two argue, I can see that neither of you will be able to convince the other and I think I see a way to end the confusion.

**ADEMANTIS:** If you do, then what's been holding your tongue for so long?

**GLAUCON:** If you turn around you will see. Look over there. See? There is Socrates. Let's call him over and give him a chance to defend himself.

**POLIMARCHUS:** Don't call him over. He will only start playing his childish questioning game. If I wanted to play games, I would play with my grandchildren and not with a talkative old fool who protects himself with questions like a child hiding behind his mother's skirt. Any man who

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hides behind questions to say what he means is afraid to talk like a man. When I have something to say, I say it and when I want to argue a point, I want to be around men who state what they feel directly and simply. Now, if you still don't agree with what I've said, I'll repeat a few points, then I'm sure you'll be convinced.

**ADEMANTIS:** And whether you call him over or not, Glaucon, it matters little to me because I have already answered Polimarchus' attacks against Socrates, but he can't hear anything except the sound of certainty in his own voice.

**GLAUCON:** If both of you still disagree, then why not invite him over to see if he can explain himself. Or are both of you so disinterested in the truth that you prefer to go on word-fighting like women at the Agora.

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**ADEMANTIS:** You won't have to invite Socrates.

**GLAUCON:** And why not?

**ADEMANTIS:** Because he is coming this way. You know, I think he must be part hunting-dog — the way he tracks down a discussion.

**GLAUCON:** Come right over here, Socrates, and find a place here among us. I am sure you know everyone here except Polimarchus and his friend, Vinodorus. They recently returned to Athens after a long absence. Do you know, Socrates, that you arrived at an opportune time, for had you delayed, I think there would have been more than mere words hurled in the air. What started as a simple inquiry, now seems like a prelude to a brawl. If we are to resume the discussion, we need a calm influence to reestablish order. Ademantis was . . .

**POLIMARCHUS:** Socrates, let me tell you before these friends of yours distort what I have said. First, the fact that you walked in as you did will neither cause me to change what I have said nor alter what I intend to say, even though these so-called friends of yours may wish differently. I am a merchant, and, as you must know, have traveled widely. I have assembled both experience and wealth, and have learned not to waste words or valuable time in disputes. The reason I entered this discussion was to tell these people what I think of you and why I consider your influence a pernicious one. As I traveled in foreign lands, instead of hearing praise sung for Athens' commerce, I heard Athenians ridiculed because of you philosophers. They think we must all be fools or old women for allowing these endless meaningless debates to continue. You, Socrates, have urged many into this idle sport by your foolish insistence upon carrying

discussions to the point of absurdity. This reputation for nonsense has brought Athens nothing but a mantle of shame. Instead of urging young men to enter business and commerce, you twist their interests, distort their true nobility and render them useless except to gather in small circles and talk in whispers. I said, and I repeat now, that you cloak yourself with the guise of a questioner, but your questions never ask, they answer themselves. The answers are already built into your questions, they don't come from those you question. Next, I said your head is in the clouds and you could never aid practical men in their affairs and, judging by those sitting around here, you only interest those who need a diversion from boredom. Lastly, since you are no help to anyone, I believe you should be exposed and

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ridiculed into silence. However, I will admit one small thing. You have one function, and that is that you keep some of the idle rich from mixing in the affairs of practical men. Now these points need no debating and should be obvious to everyone — everyone, that is, except Ademantis over there, who I thought had more brains than to disagree with me. He claims that he would have agreed with me on some points, but that he heard of a discussion between you and the wine-drinking Alcibiades.<sup>3</sup> Ademantis believes you did help him, which, of course, is absurd, for everyone knows that no one can help a drunkard. In fact, no one can really say how or even who should help these drinkers.

**ADEMANTIS:** Socrates, do you hear that attack? Polimarchus has repeated his charges and stands like a warrior ready for battle. Surely, you will join him in combat?

**POLIMARCHUS:** Look here, Ademantis, I am not going to subject myself to his ridiculous questioning. When discussing the obvious, only fools question.

**GLAUCON:** Don't get up to leave now, Polimarchus. You must hear Socrates' defense.

**POLIMARCHUS:** All right, I will under one condition, and that is he must answer me in like manner, without playing his usual twisting game.

**GLAUCON:** Socrates, it does look as if you have the argument.

**SOCRATES:** Listening to you, Polimarchus, I was shaken by your charges and wondered if I might not have made a mistake in joining you here. I then wondered whether in your travels you had become a stranger to your homeland and had adopted the gods of some foreign land. And, curiously enough, I remembered Homer's remark that the god of strangers shows special concern

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<sup>3</sup> See GRIMES, P. Alcibiades; a dialogue utilizing the dialectic as a mode of psychotherapy for alcoholism. *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* **22**: 277-297, 1961. <https://archive.org/details/grimes-alcibiades>

for the meek and just and, thinking that must be true, I found new courage to endure your attacks. It was then I realized, that my friends here might have forgotten their obligation to show real concern for one another, and for me as well, by being the first to correct one another's mistakes. It might have happened that their failure to correct my most glaring error has left to strangers what friends had thought was an odious task. Examining one's beliefs should always be the first concern among friends and, I think, we are not far

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from the truth when we think that the gods themselves may lend assistance to such an inquiry. Surely, we would be in error if we thought that the gods only listen and attend to prayers, invocations, supplications and petitions, and then failed to notice the pursuit of truth in serious discussions. Thus, we should do Polimarchus honor and listen carefully to what he says. But on the other hand, Polimarchus, you seem to deny us the opportunity to question you and draw out your meaning. Are you, Polimarchus, asserting that there is no value in the pursuit of philosophy? And that men are made wiser and nobler not by studying that which is noble and good but in commerce and such things?

**POLIMARCHUS:** There he goes again with his silly tales and remarks, What I said is simple enough and needs no further comment, especially since I have heard how you twist the meanings of words, and are quick to take them in their most damaging sense just to win an argument. No, I will say no more.

**SOCRATES:** Even you will agree that no one can persuade those who refuse to talk, if you retreat into silence.

**POLIMARCHUS:** I do not care to end this argument by default, and I am curious as to how you will answer these charges. The principle of all market-dealings is compromise, so then let me offer compromise and add to it a challenge. Repeat for my companion over there what it is you claimed you did for Alcibiades. He is a drunkard. He works hard and is devoted to his work until we achieve our goal and then he throws away all he has gained on a ruinously long bout. He often says, "I can't stand success and I don't know why." Here is a match for you. Repeat your efforts with Vinodorus and, if you do him any good, I'll change my mind about philosophy. If, on the other hand, you fail, then all this philosophy can be truly seen as pretentious, dangerous and corrupting, and someone some day should find a way to deal with you. What do you say, Vinodorus, will you agree to this? But, before you answer, remember I am still not convinced that you have really decided to quit the wine, so I might use this as a sort of test of your sincerity. Take this challenge, for Socrates can do nothing else than accept or he will have to admit defeat and be made out a complete fool before his friends.

**SOCRATES:** Dear Polimarchus, I am sure you want me to accept your challenge as much as I desire to determine the truth of what you say, but I must admit that I can't, for if I were to accept this

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contest, I would lose even if you crowned my head with laurel wreaths and loudly proclaimed me the winner. You want me to answer your criticisms and to try to persuade you out of your deeply felt beliefs. You ask me to do this by substitution, as if one can exchange Polimarchus with Vinodorus, and I presume you still ask that I restrict the manner of my replies and refrain from asking questions, which would leave me with a disagreeable alternative — to lecture you out of your beliefs. Certainly, Polimarchus, you expect too much of me. To transform beliefs would require a rhetorician of the stature of Gorgias or even of Prodicus himself. Yet, even if I could change your beliefs somehow, there would still remain the question of the truth of the beliefs themselves. Hence, it seems you do not desire to determine the truth of this matter, but only to have a contest of rhetoric, unless you are advancing the strange and foreign doctrine that the test of ideas is determined by how one feels about them, as if ideas were like new dishes that were to be tested by tasting instead of examining what effects they have upon the soul. However, my friend, in truth I have nothing to teach and without even a pretense to knowledge one cannot lecture. I cannot therefore answer you in like manner even though I would like an opportunity to continue the points you raised. Actually the notion that there are some who seem to destroy the good they create has always been of interest to me. Some destroy it by drink, but others with equal fury destroy it by cowardice, injustice and arrogance. Philosophy is a stranger to these people and, yet, they do not see that philosophy alone may be the very medicine they need to cure the psyche of its confusion. We are always discussing philosophical matters here among ourselves and may be guilty of offending the gods by not bringing philosophy down into the region where it can also free the chains of those tied to images that they fail to comprehend. If such be the case, we could do no better than to meet any challenge regardless of the source or nature of the problem. I do think weighty matters are at stake and must ask you if you might not reconsider and let us examine together what has been said.

**POLIMARCHUS:** All right, then, reply in any way you want, but not to me but to Vinodorus. In fact, you can proceed in any way you like, only leave me out of it.

**VINODORUS:** I can't say I enjoy the prospect of inheriting this argument, Socrates. I never could talk philosophy when I was

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younger. I tried studying philosophy once but I kept confusing one philosopher with another; I couldn't sort out what each said, so I should be the last to try to talk philosophy here. I

couldn't store in my head what philosophers seem to have on their tongues. Some time ago I tried to talk philosophy with Gorgias, and that surely taught me to leave philosophy alone. I must have looked a fool: Gorgias caught and tied me in verbal knots. I couldn't say anything that he didn't twist and distort into its opposite. Now I know when I'm among philosophers it is better for me to watch while they duel with each other. So if I was no match for them, then my chances of defending myself against you now, Socrates, would be zero. But, if this is the price I have to pay to stay in business with Polimarchus, I guess I'll have to do it.

**SOCRATES:** I think you have been a stranger from Athens for too long, Vinodorus, and have forgotten there is a difference between those who use philosophy and those who follow the logos in philosophy. When men use philosophy, they attack and defend beliefs and clash with one another as if they were combatants but they show by their actions that they are ignorant of the most precious part of philosophy, dialectic. The Corybantes are said to have been the first to celebrate dialectic. They say it was given to them as a pure gift from the gods so that men might learn to carry on discussions with one another on the model of those philosophical talks held among the gods; they say the dialectic has made possible a kind of link between man and the gods.

We, too, Vinodorus, recognize dialectic as a gift from the gods and when we follow the word, the logos, in imitation of that model in the heavens, we share and participate in some small measure in that lofty realm. To reach such heights is not a simple task, we need a guide to lead us up those steep trails, someone who can warn us of dangers and return us safely from those high reaches without injury; and, most important, to lead us into the rarefied air slowly in order that we may get accustomed to the vision of things from the lofty peaks, for if we go unprepared and without guidance we may find ourselves dizzy, perplexed, and unable to comprehend what there is to be seen. From the discussion you mentioned, the one you had with Gorgias, it would seem you went with a guide who enjoyed the climbing but not the view, who instead of avoiding unnecessary danger, sought it, and didn't care how, or even if, you descended to safety.

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And so, Vinodorus, you will find we engage in a different mode of discourse here than you have encountered, for we too respect a divine gift and strive to do everything in our power to mirror those lofty philosophical discussions that surely must be carried on in the heavens.

**VINODORUS:** You make it sound interesting, However, I still feel you have the wrong man to talk philosophy with, because I don't know what or how to say it.

**SOCRATES:** There is only one simple rule to learn.

**VINODORUS:** What is it?

**SOCRATES:** That we agree to stop the discussion whenever either of us fails to understand what is being said, and to question until we have clarified whatever seems obscure to us.

**VINODORUS:** Surely that should be simple enough to do.

**SOCRATES:** Yet I think there is another thing. Would you say, further, since we are the participants in this talk, that we should try to forget the audience and even Polimarchus, for we would be foolish, indeed, to court favor among the audience and be unable to silence our own doubts?

**VINODORUS:** Very true indeed.

**SOCRATES:** Well then, Vinodorus, would you, explain Polimarchus' meaning as to your statement that "you can't stand success and don't know why"?

**VINODORUS:** Well, Socrates, I really don't drink wine all the time; in fact, there are times I don't even need a drink, or I may even take a drink or two and walk away. But there are other times — as when I work hard to achieve something big and I'm only a step or two away — when I go off on a real bout. I seem to toss away everything I've worked so hard for and end up with nothing. It just seems that some of us can't stand success. I can't say I like talking about it but that's all there is to my story.

**SOCRATES:** I have heard some men talk the way you do now, but I never had the opportunity to examine the matter and there is much in it that puzzles me. I have heard this term "success" used in the market-place and I am not sure I understand its meaning. Would you tell me what you mean by it?

**VINODORUS:** I don't like to be jested with, Socrates, I think you know what I mean.

**SOCRATES:** Perhaps I should. Would you explain your meaning?

**VINODORUS:** I can't tell for sure when you're jesting, but I'll go

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along for a while at least. What I think you mean by the Good, Socrates, my friends in Italy

call “successus,” or as we call it, success; it’s a popular word and it means what it says. A person is called a success who achieves the top. Everyone who is anyone achieves success. It is the measure of a man.

**SOCRATES:** Vinodorus, does success come after you achieve any goal at all or must the goal possess some special quality of goodness?

**VINODORUS:** Do you take my meaning of success to include the man who wins a race against children? Success only comes when you have tested your worth and achieved an acceptance into the company of successful men.

**SOCRATES:** Is success then sought because of the desirability of the goal or because you gain entrance into the company of successful men?

**VINODORUS:** It amounts to the same thing — when you get one you get the other.

**SOCRATES:** It is an admirable thing to become friends with noble men, but tell me the way in which you recognize their nobility.

**VINODORUS:** All you have to do is to look at them, Socrates. They have gained the respect and admiration of their fellowmen and are doing something important.

**SOCRATES:** Then would you say their nobility resides not in what you desire and don’t have, but in what they do with what you desire?

**VINODORUS:** What?

**SOCRATES:** Well, have you not noticed that wealthy men do not desire wealth, which they already have, but the continued possession of it? Then, too, have you ever noticed lovers the way they are when apart . . . they only think of the time when they will be together, and when they are joined, they desire not to be together, which they already are, but to perpetuate that state?

**VINODORUS:** Of course.

**SOCRATES:** You say you want to emulate and model yourself after those noble men of wealth, yet you find yourself throwing away the very thing which could gain you admittance in their company.



**VINODORUS:** And if I could just find a way to keep success I'd be like them.

**SOCRATES:** Yet, if we only observed your actions, your throwing away of success, wouldn't it seem you are discarding what you no longer prize?

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**VINODORUS:** It might look like that, but I know what I want!

**SOCRATES:** Then do I understand you to mean that what you really want is to display your success so that others may clearly see what you have achieved?

**VINODORUS:** That's true.

**SOCRATES:** But if you have missed the mark, or goal, again and again, wouldn't it seem worth your while to examine this carefully in some detail and watch for clues that might explain why you failed when you most wanted to succeed?

**VINODORUS:** Perhaps.

**SOCRATES:** Then do you agree we should also examine the matter to see if there might be some way you could avoid in the future the misery you have experienced in the past?

**VINODORUS:** And how do we do this?

**SOCRATES:** By questioning until we find what ideas have nurtured this clash between thought and reality; unless we can do this there will be no cessation of the conflict and suffering in your life. Yet, in all fairness, I should advise you, this is not a simple thing to correct, because what we haven't learned we cannot use, nor is it possible to experience anything truly new without allowing for its possibility to unfold.

**VINODORUS:** Then ask me a few questions and tell me what idea I need to know. What can be simpler than that?

**SOCRATES:** Oh friend, Vinodorus, how can I tell what we haven't found? We must explore the matter first to find what we must know.

**VINODORUS:** Let me tell you something, Socrates. I really can't go along with this; it sounds kind of empty to me. I'll admit I have a problem with wine, but you can't convince me a mere idea

can mean this much.

**SOCRATES:** Ideas may seem too impotent to guide men's actions when you compare them with the impact that passions and emotions have in our lives. The passions and emotions have an immediacy, a felt urgency about them, and when we see the consequences of these forces it is easy to understand why we often attribute to them the causes of our actions. Yet, the fury and intensity of these forces are always in the service of some goal we seek to encompass. The goal itself is part of our innate capacity for seeking in reality what was first a possibility in our mind. The vision we frame may be hidden from view, having gone through many convolutions, still vision charts the course of man. This vision we share with heaven;

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the gods themselves find in it their portentous majesty, and in it man finds his link with the harmony of the spheres.

**VINODORUS:** It would be nice to believe all this.

**SOCRATES:** Perhaps, if we could find some example which could throw light on what seems so remote and obscure it would reduce your objections and allow us to proceed.

**VINODORUS:** That I'd like.

**SOCRATES:** Vinodorus, did you, like all young Athenians, study Euclid's Elements?

**VINODORUS:** Yes, but spare me any review; that's one pursuit I have no desire to resume. I have had my troubles with Euclid. Find some other example, Socrates.

**SOCRATES:** I wouldn't think of returning either of us to geometry. I was only curious if you ever noticed how some students study the theorems of geometry.

**VINODORUS:** What do you mean?

**SOCRATES:** Do you recall how some students spend considerable time puzzling over theorems and, then, when the moment of insight comes, they appear ecstatic and joyous?

**VINODORUS:** Well it didn't happen very often to me. I preferred to memorize. If you're ever called by your instructor to demonstrate a theorem you'll find it's easier to have memorized. Anyway, it doesn't matter too much because either way you learn the theorem.

**SOCRATES:** Yes, either method supplies an answer but, in addition, doesn't one method give something the other doesn't?

**VINODORUS:** Perhaps.

**SOCRATES:** And would you say the additional element gained by insight lies in the perception of how all the parts interrelate, giving meaning and necessity to the whole?

**VINODORUS:** Yes, I could say that.

**SOCRATES:** And when you experience and know it in this way, not just the recitation of some order of words, doesn't this give the student the beginning of knowledge?

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** In addition, if in your demonstration of the theorem, you parallel it with a geometrical figure, showing step by step the relation between your reasoning and the figure you construct, then, wouldn't you say that you both know and can communicate what you know? And would you agree, when one claims to know, or has

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a feeling he knows, but can't proceed in this way, we must call it belief and opinion?

**VINODORUS:** You know, Socrates, I once tried to study geometry that way, but I found you couldn't always get the insights when you needed them. So, I settled for memory; that's safe and sure.

**SOCRATES:** Safe and sure to do what?

**VINODORUS:** Why to demonstrate it when you are called upon, of course.

**SOCRATES:** But were you demonstrating anything more than memory?

**VINODORUS:** What?

**SOCRATES:** If all you learned was the order of the words then that's all you could demonstrate.

**VINODORUS:** Oh, I guess so, but that's all that was asked for.

**SOCRATES:** And that is all that you knew?

**VINODORUS:** In a way.

**SOCRATES:** And if you forgot even one part or sentence in the sequence of the proof, what happened?

**VINODORUS:** You mean when I got stuck? Well, that's not a very pleasant feeling to have. It's the time when you know only too well that your instructor knows how little you really know.

**SOCRATES:** You mean he can tell you have been memorizing a proof and actually failed to learn it?

**VINODORUS:** Yes.

**SOCRATES:** So reliance upon memorizing gives the appearance of knowing without really knowing.

**VINODORUS:** But I knew something!

**SOCRATES:** True, there is some semblance of knowing, and maybe we shouldn't call it not-knowing or ignorance.

**VINODORUS:** Very true.

**SOCRATES:** Then let us call it belief.

**VINODORUS:** But look here, Socrates, what difference does it make? One way or the other still gets you through the theorem.

**SOCRATES:** You might be right, but let us reflect for a moment on what has been said. Did you not say and mean that you began to rely upon memory because it was surer and safer, and this led you to abandon any reliance upon insight?

**VINODORUS:** Yes.

**SOCRATES:** And this led you to be satisfied with opinion, the semblance of knowledge, rather than the reality?

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**VINODORUS:** In a way, I guess you might say that.

**SOCRATES:** But was your instructor engaged to teach you geometry or merely to train your memory?

**VINODORUS:** You know the answer to that Socrates.

**SOCRATES:** Then were you not deceiving him into believing you knew when you, in fact, didn't know?

**VINODORUS:** That's a little strong Socrates,

**SOCRATES:** When you reflect upon it now, what would you say you really sought — the approval of others or the knowledge of geometry?

**VINODORUS:** Approval.

**SOCRATES:** Of the two, approval or knowledge, which have you found of more value?

**VINODORUS:** Don't tell me one is hollow, the other lofty, because I don't feel this way about the loftiness of knowledge.

**SOCRATES:** Unless the choice between the "hollow" and the "lofty" involves much more.

**VINODORUS:** Why so?

**SOCRATES:** Whenever a man fails to rely upon his own understanding he becomes less than himself, by seeking support from others for what he alone can give. Deprived of the use of the noblest faculty, man seeks the support and guidance of the crowd, thus exiling himself to live in reflected and distorted light, as if in a cave. Some men learn to speak eloquently about the shadows cast on the wall of their minds, but the freshness and spontaneity of their speech is contrived and studied. If they were forced to emerge from this cave-like existence they would have to learn to approach each thing directly and free themselves from the chains of their own memory. The chains they wear are forged out of the beliefs they can't disentangle but feel they must keep to preserve some image of themselves and of their authorities. It often happens that while they are in the cave, they compare one another's chains, examine how they are linked, and compliment one another on their security. They often give priestly robes and prizes to the

one whose chains are the strongest and best wrought and they praise those who can compose arguments to best justify their enslavement.

**VINODORUS:** And what of those who drop their chains, Socrates?

**SOCRATES:** The Corybantes tell us a strange and wondrous thing, Vinodorus, they say that for those who can permit insight the soul journeys upward to become fused with the noblest light of reality.

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In this upward journey, the self moves to the light beyond the light that showers dazzlingly down and through all reality.

**VINODORUS:** Socrates, that's one story I'll try to remember . . . but where are we in this discussion? I seem to have lost sight of our goal.

**SOCRATES:** How right you seem to be, and I must admonish myself against taking off on such tangents, yet we are not like lawyers and their kind, because when we find a pleasant road that has been little traveled in discussion and when we find ourselves by that fork, we often walk along it for a short while and return to our former route refreshed and relaxed from the journey. Do you not agree?

**VINODORUS:** I find it hard to disagree with you Socrates.

**SOCRATES:** If your agreement is in harmony with your understanding, let us travel again on our route of discovery. Taking our geometry student again, what would happen if he were presented with a new problem and asked to seek out its proof?

**VINODORUS:** You mean one that he hadn't done before?

**SOCRATES:** Yes.

**VINODORUS:** Well he couldn't memorize what he hadn't studied yet.

**SOCRATES:** He would have to seek out his own proof?

**VINODORUS:** True, enough. I think it might panic him as it would me.

**SOCRATES:** Did it?

**VINODORUS:** Socrates, I don't think you know about this but it happened to me and I remember it only too well. I can still recall it. There was a large audience and I thought I would be called upon to give one of my splendid recitations, but Anaxorus of Spartus was in the audience and he stood up and asked me to solve a problem I hadn't studied beforehand. I can still remember it. He asked me to prove that "spheres are to one another in the triplicate ratios of their respective diameters."

**SOCRATES:** Very good, what happened?

**VINODORUS:** As well as I knew all the other problems, I didn't even know in what way to proceed. I felt miserable. What I felt I hid behind my embarrassed silence. I felt a fool.

**SOCRATES:** What do you think you would have needed to solve the problem?

**VINODORUS:** On that day, Socrates, I would have given the very heavens, if I could have known a way to discover the proof of that problem.

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**SOCRATES:** And all you really learned from the study of geometry was a way to memorize but not how to discover?

**VINODORUS:** If there is a way to learn how to discover, then that's what I should have learned.

**SOCRATES:** And what you didn't learn you couldn't use?

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** Then we see that your having placed approval first among your goals actually robbed you of an opportunity of learning the very thing you were studying.

**VINODORUS:** I think so.

**SOCRATES:** And isn't this a part of what we sought?

**VINODORUS:** Socrates, I feel I have been brought here, step by step, much like my old study of geometry. But it is difficult to believe that things I don't understand, or haven't discovered, can be the cause of my troubles. I can see this in some way with geometry, but it's hard to admit

this kind of thing can actually happen in my life. What have I misunderstood, or failed to learn, that I keep losing success?

**SOCRATES:** And would telling help you? I wonder about that. Let's examine this together. When you were satisfied with only memorizing a theorem's proof, didn't you find discovering its truth was unnecessary?

**VINODORUS:** Yes,

**SOCRATES:** And would you say, that even though the solution was correct the words were really not yours because you hadn't tested or experienced their truth for yourself?

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** Since you seem to have been only partly interested in learning the theorem, shouldn't we also add that when you drew a geometrical figure to accompany and interpret your recitation it clarified very little, if anything, for you?

**VINODORUS:** I must agree with that too.

**SOCRATES:** Then can we draw a small conclusion? Can we say, no matter how true an idea may or may not be, we must see if we can find some way for it to pass into our own way of seeing and to include it in our own vision; otherwise it will remain merely a shadow having no power to help shape our vision.

**VINODORUS:** You know, Socrates, I have been a stranger from Athens for too long. What's the right way to explore this problem; how would you have me start?

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**SOCRATES:** Let's see if we can set out the parts of this notion of "success." Explain how you start this success-quest from the beginning.

**VINODORUS:** You mean when I turn about and start on some new fresh task?

**SOCRATES:** Yes.

**VINODORUS:** That's the great time of life, let me tell you, Socrates; then I find activity is a real challenge. I'm full of life, work hard, and never notice nor care about the passing time; I make



all kinds of sacrifices and feel I'm getting on top of the world. There is nothing that can stop me and anyone in my way I see as my personal challenge; if I start out on the bottom anyone between me and the top becomes my enemy and I have only one thought and one preoccupation — success. But I don't see why that feeling and thinking evaporates into the air when I reach for the top. Before I reach it I know I am proving myself because of what I see about me; yet as I reach the goal I seem to let it slip away. I don't know why it is that I toss it away. I do know, however, that I look around and for no reason find myself staring into a wine jug. I need only one or two drinks and then I forget about everything I have built up; everything I have sacrificed for and worked so hard to achieve goes, and goes who knows where. When I return to my sober mind I find nothing but the destruction I have wrought.

**SOCRATES:** Yes, I have heard similar tales.

**VINODORUS:** You have heard; I have lived them. I wonder what good there is in hearing another.

**SOCRATES:** Unless, of course, we listen to the counsel of those wise men of the past who told us to heed the stories of old and compare our lives with them and then to weigh the difference.

**VINODORUS:** What are you thinking of?

**SOCRATES:** I recall the tale of Agave, the mother of the King of Thebes, who with the women of Boeotia participated in a Dionysiac ritual on Mount Cithaeron and slew a creature with their bare hands. Do you remember the story of how Agave, ecstatic and in a frenzy, carried its head atop a staff, and demanded it be mounted next to a boar's head in the town Square, until Cadmus, her horrified husband, returned her to her senses and forced her to see she had been carrying the head of Pentheus, her son, whom she had slain? When I think about this story of Agave, I think these wise men of old were pointing to the terrible dangers that exist

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when we use wine to transform us, instead of seeking the purification of the mysteries and philosophy.

**VINODORUS:** I know the story and I don't like to be reminded of it. If I hurt anyone it's only myself, and I can get back what I tossed away.

**SOCRATES:** If you find you are destroying the very things that you seek to achieve, does it not occur to you that you may be among those who, like Agave, should have refrained from drinking wine?

**VINODORUS:** I don't have any trouble. I have sworn off many times. The only problem I have is that I can't control it when I start.

**SOCRATES:** If you can't control it, or the consequences, then the story has met its match. If stopping is no problem, then why you start drinking is the problem. It seems then that we should return to the problem.

**VINODORUS:** Wherever you go, I'll be right behind you.

**SOCRATES:** Let us see, then. We have one, two, and are looking for the third. You have told how you sacrificed for your goal of success, how you threw it away, so now we need to complete the picture with the third part.

**VINODORUS:** What part is that?

**SOCRATES:** What do you think of yourself when you view what you have just thrown away?

**VINODORUS:** Terrible. And sometimes when I wake up I find I need a drink badly. If I can quit drinking or taper off, then I slowly return to my former self.

**SOCRATES:** And what do you think of yourself?

**VINODORUS:** Not much.

**SOCRATES:** In what way?

**VINODORUS:** If I could assemble all the curses, all the foul remarks and bitter accusations thrown against me, I would believe them all and add some of my own. I feel like an outcast, a barbarian, a contemptible creature — in a word I feel I'm no damned good.

**SOCRATES:** Then when you return to your sober mind, after shaking off remorse, you again resume the cycle?

**VINODORUS:** Very true.

**SOCRATES:** And when you resume a new task, do you still regard yourself as “no damned good”?  
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**VINODORUS:** Oh, it doesn't last, because as soon as I take on a new challenge, then I can try to set things aright.

**SOCRATES:** Let's see — what follows then?

**VINODORUS:** Well as soon as I get where I'm going I begin to lose interest and everything seems bland and dull. I get the feeling of "What's the use"; it's a little hard to explain, but everything seems hollow and void of color.

**SOCRATES:** But where are the rewards you mentioned should attend success?

**VINODORUS:** I guess they are not there, at least not for me.

**SOCRATES:** But you expected rewards, didn't you?

**VINODORUS:** Yes, I think so.

**SOCRATES:** And not just for a day but permanently?

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** If you weren't changed by success what remained unchanged?

**VINODORUS:** Old thoughts and feelings, and when they came back they weren't very pleasant companions.

**SOCRATES:** And then —

**VINODORUS:** And then it's very easy to take the next cup of wine that comes your way, because I look around and see nothing matters, and I get the feeling that I would like to smash the hollowness and stupidity of life, only I know it isn't worth destroying. It's like the feeling you get when you find you are lost and don't care where you're going or if you ever get there.

**SOCRATES:** And then . . .

**VINODORUS:** And then I grow restless and would like to smash everything false and rotten, but I see I'm no good either, so I go and drown myself in wine. My only worry is whether there will

be enough wine to keep me going.

**SOCRATES:** When you awake from this bout do you feel different, do those feelings remain?

**VINODORUS:** If you mean after I recover from one of my bouts, I guess I'll have to say I do feel different.

**SOCRATES:** In what way?

**VINODORUS:** Well, Socrates, it's a little strange to say, but in recovering from a long binge the world looks a little fresher and brighter and, in spite of the fact that I've thrown everything away, I seem relieved and feel a little better.

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**SOCRATES:** But what happened to the bitterness that started your drinking?

**VINODORUS:** After the first few drinks there is no bitterness, because a sense of well-being floods me and I feel the equal of any man. Why, I walk among any group of men and feel far superior. I'm wiser and better than at any time.

**SOCRATES:** Instead of success transforming you ...

**VINODORUS:** I've found it in wine, that's what it sounds like.

**SOCRATES:** Then you may be seeking one thing and finding it in another?

**VINODORUS:** Surely.

**SOCRATES:** Did you smash success, or merely your own notion of success?

**VINODORUS:** What do you mean?

**SOCRATES:** A while ago you mentioned that it may be that you found in wine what you thought you were cheated out of in success. Is that not so?

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** But you admit you didn't discover what you sought in success.

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** Then how can you be sure that if you are successful you will feel anything like the feelings you get from drinking the wine?

**VINODORUS:** Well it should make you feel different, maybe not exactly like the wine-feeling, but it should be something like it!

**SOCRATES:** Be careful now. We are not saying you don't find the effects of wine desirable, merely questioning why you expect those feelings to occur with success.

**VINODORUS:** I may be mistaken about success, but not about the effects of wine.

**SOCRATES:** Let's examine the matter.

**VINODORUS:** I don't know what you mean.

**SOCRATES:** If you are hungry, do you eat after you have satisfied your feelings of hunger?

**VINODORUS:** I could, but I don't.

**SOCRATES:** And again, when thirsty, do you continue to drink after you have quenched your thirst?

**VINODORUS:** No.

**SOCRATES:** Because you experience the state you sought?

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**VINODORUS:** Of course.

**SOCRATES:** Then any addition or increase would be unnecessary.

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** If, after a few drinks you reach a desirable state why do you continue drinking?

**VINODORUS:** You don't understand. You see, as soon as the feelings begin to recede, and sometimes even before they recede, you grasp for another flask of wine. You don't want that inner-glow feeling to go out.

**SOCRATES:** That seems a delicate balance to maintain.

**VINODORUS:** Some can keep it going for quite a while.

**SOCRATES:** And you have?

**VINODORUS:** Yes.

**SOCRATES:** I'm not sure I understand this; would you take a recent drinking experience and describe this?

**VINODORUS:** When I begin to drink, Socrates, I try to get that "inner glow" right away, so I gulp it down quickly. Then before the effect diminishes, I rush for another drink and one wine calls for another. I want to recapture and prolong that feeling again and again.

**SOCRATES:** Then you are trying to recapture a feeling you remember from some previous time?

**VINODORUS:** That's right.

**SOCRATES:** When was the last time you had this feeling?

**VINODORUS:** I do get it, but not the way I used to get it. At one time just a few drinks would put me where I wanted to be, only now it's not that sure.

**SOCRATES:** What do you mean?

**VINODORUS:** It's difficult to say because there are parts I forget and can't remember. I know the highlights but there seem to be parts that are missing. So I guess I would have to say I can't really tell just how long I did enjoy myself. If I could drink without getting drunk, I'd enjoy it more. You know, I keep thinking, maybe this time I won't get drunk and may be able to enjoy myself like the rest of you.

**SOCRATES:** Then you don't intend to get drunk when you start drinking?

**VINODORUS:** I seldom intentionally drink to get drunk. It just happens that when I start, I end in getting drunk.

**SOCRATES:** Well . . .

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**VINODORUS:** Yes, I know, I shouldn't drink but I get disgusted with everything and so I drink it up.

**SOCRATES:** Is wine the only thing you have found which does this, or have you tried other potions as well?

**VINODORUS:** I will tell you, because I think I am among friends. Several years ago I went with a few friends into the sacred groves at Delphi and stole some Laurel leaves and, just as the priestesses have done, chewed the leaves and was carried far off on an inward journey. No, I won't risk this again; I'll stay with the wine. I don't want to be in another world, I want to feel big in this one. Wine is for men, let the priestesses of Delphi chew their leaves. I'll tell you. Take this talk we're having. If I had a few drinks in me, I wouldn't have any difficulty answering your questions or anyone else's. After a few cups I can talk to anyone about anything. I'm sure of myself and never worry about this or that. I just talk right out and I just know I'm right. I plan ahead and get all sorts of good ideas. That's the moment when I can figure out anything. I get ideas that strike me as being right — why, you can just see the richness and truth of them and you know that after you sober up you'll be able to settle all your problems and set everything straight. Socrates, if I could plan battles in such a state, I could be a greater general than Leonitides.

**SOCRATES:** This is certainly wondrous. From what you say, it seems Dionysus caused Athena to leap from Zeus' brow. And, Vinodorus, what happened when you returned to your sober mind and tried to apply these rich, noble and true insights?

**VINODORUS:** Oh the ideas were still great. It just seemed that things got in my way when I wanted to put them in action. I still feel the ideas were true, only the sober man failed them. If I could implement them while drinking, that would gain me a week at the Anestheria.

**SOCRATES:** Then why don't you?

**VINODORUS:** Maybe when I'm drinking that's all I want.

**SOCRATES:** And maybe, after wine it's easier to feel like a general than to be one.

**VINODORUS:** Yes, though it sounds odd when you say it. Say, Socrates, I just thought of something — if I had had a jug of wine with me the time Anaxorus asked me that geometry problem, I'm damned sure I could have solved it.

**SOCRATES:** Do you mean the wine could awaken a direct per-  
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ception into the proof of the problem? And, would it also show how the parts weave themselves together and make the demonstration a natural thing of beauty for the mind to behold? If so, wine should be considered a wondrous thing.

**VINODORUS:** I can't go that far, but I'd feel free to try any idea without the fear of looking a fool if I made a mistake.

**SOCRATES:** And the wine removes the fear?

**VINODORUS:** It surely does.

**SOCRATES:** Are all the ideas you have during the wine-drinking true and good? Are some better than others?

**VINODORUS:** Well, I'd say ideas and women all sound and look good after a few jugs of wine!

**SOCRATES:** Then the wine makes everything look good. Would you say it's the wine-feeling that makes the idea seem good? |

**VINODORUS:** It helps.

**SOCRATES:** I'm sure you have had strong feelings about ideas too and then, later, found you were mistaken.

**VINODORUS:** True.

**SOCRATES:** Did you find the wine-feelings kept you from being mistaken?

**VINODORUS:** No, but you don't care about being mistaken when you're drinking, either.



**SOCRATES:** Perhaps, because you weren't seeking approval either?

**VINODORUS:** Maybe.

**SOCRATES:** Would you say these ideas were truly great or is it truly great to have ideas you can express without being burdened about what others may think?

**VINODORUS:** A mixture of both, at least I hope so.

**SOCRATES:** Have you ever sought for a way to approve your own ideas, to test their worth, or is it simply enough that at the time they seem true?

**VINODORUS:** When I'm drinking I don't worry about it.

**SOCRATES:** And when sober?

**VINODORUS:** No, not then either.

**SOCRATES:** And when drinking, you say whatever you feel needs saying without worry about making mistakes, and without seeking approval, is this so?

**VINODORUS:** Yes.

**SOCRATES:** Would you want to act this way when sober?

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**VINODORUS:** I surely would. I've tried to act this way and can't say it worked out very well.

**SOCRATES:** What did you try that didn't work?

**VINODORUS:** Oh, I tried to act with assurance and confidence, only I didn't have enough of it.

**SOCRATES:** Is that like trying to act as if you had the confidence and assurance that is the natural accompaniment of knowledge?

**VINODORUS:** Either way, it works.

**SOCRATES:** Until some Anaxorus of Spartus throws a challenge at you.

**VINODORUS:** By Zeus, why return to that?

**SOCRATES:** Because the similarities between these situations seem to point to the same thing. Or, does it just appear as if you are, again, seeking to mimic the knowledge of others?

**VINODORUS:** I guess you're right, seems so, but right now I'm not sure of anything. Maybe I am mimicking others but I don't see any other way open for me. In fact, Socrates, if there is some other way I would like to know about it and if it is any easier I'll even try it.

**SOCRATES:** Before you try something new, let's see further into what it is you are actually doing. Now, if you were trying to bring about some change in yourself by mimicking others, would you say this is an art requiring skills of copying outward appearances like painting, acting and the like?

**VINODORUS:** Yes, it would seem so.

**SOCRATES:** Would you say this art, of which mimicking is a special part, has for its end the development of real and genuine change or would you expect such changes to be merely temporary and superficial?

**VINODORUS:** No, only temporary.

**SOCRATES:** And in the same way do you believe this skill of mimicking can bring you any lasting change in yourself?

**VINODORUS:** Perhaps not but I still don't see how I can do anything else.

**SOCRATES:** A change in oneself to be genuine is a growth towards reality, not appearance. True change carries the self because it transforms the self by shaping our vision, and by it we are brought to a progressively more profound relationship with reality. If one were to proceed correctly he must begin by naming what we do, just as we are doing here, and testing our understanding by directly

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comparing what we find in our discussion with reality itself. The more the understanding is in harmony with reality, or permits reality to emerge through us, the more we grow in depth and follow the pattern of the Logos. Any other recourse, it would seem, would anticipate experience

in the terms of appearance based upon ill-formed opinions and beliefs, thus stripping experience of its unique quality and limiting interpretations to monotonous sequences, like the play of shadows on the wall, producing endless repetitions of previous perceptions and assuring the recurrence of the past in our future. I believe the Corybantic Mysteries were right when they said the chains that bind us to the images of our past are the shadows of realities we failed to comprehend, thus limiting our destiny and obscuring the depth of our vision.

**VINODORUS:** In what way are we doing that now?

**SOCRATES:** What we have done today is the first step — examining and collecting opinions to transform into knowledge; you must now test this by observing yourself and carefully noting how much of what we said seems to be confirmed, needs modifying, or should be rejected. We must see to what extent we have caught your reality in words. Then, when we meet again, you should take the opportunity to test your understanding of these ideas and attempt to further close the gap between reason and reality.

**VINODORUS:** But what if I go off on a drinking bout, will that put an end to our talks?

**SOCRATES:** It's not a question of your drinking or not, but how to learn from experience. If you go off and get drunk, it will provide us with a fresh example to examine in detail and might even indicate there are other factors present which we haven't even guessed.

**VINODORUS:** Very well, the next time we meet I'll tell you what I've discovered and I'll watch and try to remember everything I can.

**POLIMARCHUS:** Don't tell me this is all you're going to do? Why, you didn't even get Vinodorus to promise to quit drinking; at least I got that much from him. You mean I waited all this time to hear this nonsense! Why, I can't say if I am more angry with you, Socrates, or with myself for listening to so much meaningless babble. This should certainly convince anyone here that you can only talk, talk, talk. Wait a minute, Socrates, why are you getting up — surely not to walk off without hearing more of what I've got to say?

**SOCRATES:** Does it seem to you, Vinodorus, that we have reached

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a plateau in our talk and that further talk should await the time when you can verify in some way what we have said here?

**VINODORUS:** With that I fully agree.

**SOCRATES:** That's good, because I just remembered we owe a cock to Asclepius and I should be on my way to pay this debt. Until we meet again, then, let me say, as your friends in Italy have said, "sapere aude."

## ABSTRACT

Vinodorus, the drunkard, explains that he cannot stand success; he works hard, achieves his goal, and then throws all away in a ruinous drinking bout. Under Socrates' questioning, Vinodorus perceives that success to him means to be admired as a successful man. Socrates suggests that Vinodorus is satisfied with opinion, the semblance of knowledge, rather than the reality; that he seeks the approval of others rather than real knowledge or understanding. Such a man becomes less himself, exiles himself to live in reflected and distorted light, as in a cave; truth remains a shadow having no power to help shape his vision unless it can pass into his own way of seeing and is included in his vision. Vinodorus is led to see that the rewards attendant on success are worthless to him. He drinks, therefore, finding in wine what he was seeking in success; and he continues to drink in order to recapture and keep that "inner glow." Only when drunk is Vinodorus assured and confident and has ideas that seem true and great. Socrates suggests that his lack of self-confidence while sober originates in his lack of knowledge; that he is trying to change himself by mimicking others — but such change is temporary and superficial. True change transforms the self by shaping one's vision and leads to a more profound relationship with reality. He asks Vinodorus to observe himself, even while on a binge, so that at their next meeting, Vinodorus can be led to a closer understanding of himself.